
NOTES FROM THE FIELD

Hurricane Sandy Joint Field Office: FEMA IT Connectivity Procedures at the New York City JFO

In December 2012, the LLIS.gov team conducted data collection and analysis related to Hurricane Sandy response and recovery operations in New York and New Jersey. The team observed several response and recovery good practices. This document describes one of these practices.

DESCRIPTION

Hurricane Sandy

On Monday, October 29, 2012, Hurricane Sandy made landfall near Atlantic City, New Jersey, pushing a massive storm surge to shore and generating winds to up to 75 miles per hour. Sandy caused storm surge, record flooding, and wind damage. Millions of people were left without power and hundreds were displaced along the East Coast from North Carolina to Maine.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) activated and staffed a Joint Field Office (JFO) in New York City to coordinate disaster response and recovery efforts throughout the State. FEMA established the JFO in a 350,000-square-foot vacant building in Queens. The previous tenant had moved to another location in April 2012 and this building lacked basic connectivity.

New York JFO Connectivity Procedures

Following JFO activation, FEMA Information technology (IT) staff realized that it would require several days to install a permanent hardline internet connection system throughout the 10 floors of the JFO. This lack of connectivity would likely hinder the ability of incoming JFO personnel to initiate operations soon after arrival.

IT personnel implemented the following procedures to provide connectivity to JFO staff in an effective and timely manner:

According to the Department of Homeland Security's [Joint Field Office Activation and Operations: Interagency Integrated Standard Operating Procedures](#), "The JFO is a temporary Federal multiagency coordination center established locally to facilitate field-level domestic incident management activities related to prevention, preparedness, response and recovery." Staff first deployed at a JFO may have to operate in austere environments with minimal functioning infrastructure in order to allow sufficient time for the selected temporary JFO facility to reach full operating capability.



Operations at the New York City JFO
(Source: FEMA)

- **Prioritization of Incoming Staff.** Instead of providing technical support to JFO staff on a first-come first-serve basis, IT staff prioritized support activities by taking into account resources available at the time as well as the roles and responsibilities of incoming personnel. By employing these procedures, IT staff was able to first provide technical assistance and connectivity to key personnel such as the Federal Coordinating Officer and the Section Leads. Implementation of this process helped key JFO staff receive essential technical support and start providing assistance to survivors with minimal loss of time.
- **Installation of a Wireless Connection System.** IT staff installed a wireless connection system throughout the JFO while the permanent hardline internet connection system was being installed. This allowed JFO personnel that had not yet received IT support and did not have hardwire connectivity to start organizing their activities.

The [Notes from the Field - Hurricane Sandy and the Waldo Canyon Fire: Considerations for Emergency Wi-Fi Networks](#) document described the use of wireless networks as an integral part of the Hastily Formed Network (HFN) architecture after a disaster. The author concludes that "Communications teams need to be prepared to deploy wired Ethernet early during the response, perhaps alongside of their wireless networks, in order to ensure that mission critical communications is not disrupted or delayed due to spectrum congestion, building attenuation or other radio challenges."

Outcomes

Implementation of these procedures allowed IT staff to allocate scarce IT resources and manage requests effectively and efficiently. Further, the use of a wireless system helped reduce the time a large number of JFO personnel spent waiting to get internet and network access.

RESOURCES

Bharania, Rakesh. *Notes from the Field - Hurricane Sandy and the Waldo Canyon Fire: Considerations for Emergency Wi-Fi Networks*. 21 Dec 2012.

<https://www.llis.dhs.gov/docdetails/details.do?contentID=56660>

Department of Homeland Security. *Joint Field Office Activation and Operations: Interagency Integrated Standard Operating Procedures*. 01 Apr 2006.

<https://www.llis.dhs.gov/docdetails/details.do?contentID=17563>

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